

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEGUCI 03331 151812Z
ACTION ARA-14

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R 141733Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 923
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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 3331

EO 11652 GDS
TAGS: PINT, PINS, ELAB, HO
SUBJECT: STUDENT DEMONSTRATION AND MEDICAL STRIKE

1. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN SEVERAL YEARS, A STUDENT DEMONSTRATION IN HONDURAS WAS LESS THAN PEACEFUL. ON JULY 12 STRIKING STUDENTS AT A SECONDARY SCHOOL IN SAN PEDRO SULA RE-OCCUPIED THE BUILDING UNDER A HAIL OF STONES, AFTER HAVING BEEN THROWN OUT A FEW DAYS BEFORE BY THE SCHOOL DIRECTOR AND PARENTS OR HIRELINGS (DEPENDING UPON THE VERSION). POLICE WERE CALLED IN, USED SOME TEAR GAS AND RESTORED ORDER AFTER THE BURNING OF ONE PICK-UP TRUCK. THE SCHOOL BUILDING IS NOW UNDER POLICE CONTROL.

2. THE ISSUE, WHICH HAS DRAGGED ON FOR OVER TWO MONTHS, ORIGINALLY BEGAN AS A LOCAL REQUEST FOR IMPROVEMENT IN BATHROOM FACILITIES AND COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE PRICE OF FOOD IN THE SCHOOL CANTEEN. IT GREW TO INCLUDE ATTACKS ON THE DIRECTOR AND FINALLY ENDED UP WITH A REQUEST FOR THE PRIVATE EVENING SCHOOL TO BE NATIONALIZED AND FOR TUITION TO BE LOWERED. STUDENT DEMANDS WERE SUPPORTED BY LEFTIST NATIONAL STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS.
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PAGE 02 TEGUCI 03331 151812Z

3. IN WHAT MIGHT BE A RELATED DEVELOPMENT, COMMUNIST LABOR LEADER PEDRO BRIZUELA WAS ARRESTED ON WHAT PRESS REPORTS TO BE CHARGES OF "AGITATION." BRIZUELA IS AN OFFICER OF CONSTRUCTION WORKERS UNION, AND IS ALSO ACTIVE AS AN ADVISOR TO THE DISSIDENT UNIONS THAT WALKED OUT OF THE NORTH COAST LABOR FEDERATION (FESITRANH) AND WHICH ARE NEGOTIATING JOINING THE

(CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT) GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF WORKERS (CGT).

4. AT THE SAME TIME, LAST YEAR MEDICAL STUDENTS IN TEGUCIGALPA'S PUBLIC HOSPITALS WHO RECEIVE SALARIES AS A FORM OF SCHOLARSHIP HAVE STRUCK FOR HIGHER PAY. IN A TOUGH SPEECH, MINHEALTH AGUILAR REJECTED THE STUDENTS DEMANDS AND THREATENED THEM ALL WITH DISMISSAL IF THEY DIDN'T RETURN TO WORK JULY 14. THIS WAS MET BY RENEWED DEFIANCE AND DECISION BY INTERNS TO JOIN STRIKE. A CABINET MEETING JULY 13 BACKED UP THE MINISTER AND A UNIVERSITY MEDIATION COMMISSION IS NOW ATTEMPTING TO FIND A COMPROMISE.

5. COMMENT: WHILE STUDENT DEMONSTRATION, BECAUSE OF MINOR VIOLENCE, OCCUPIED FRONT PAGES OF ALL MORNING NEWSPAPERS JULY 13, THE MEDICAL STRIKE, WITH ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR HEALTH CARE OF THE POPULACE RECEIVED ALMOST EXCLUSIVE COVERAGE ON NOON RADIO NEWS. IN BOTH CASES, LEGITIMATE GRIEVANCES SEEM TO HAVE GROWN OUT OF PROPORTION. NEVERTHELESS, WITH MODERATELY REASONABLE HANDLING, THESE TWO ISSUES SHOULD BE RESOLVED, WITH THE SCHOOL REMAINING CLOSED FOR THE YEAR IN ONE CASE, AND A COMPROMISE IN THE OTHER.

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